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## A Quest on the Development of Feminism in America in *Riding Freedom and Fingersmith*

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### **Abstract**

The feminist movement in America is experiencing rapid development. The early feminist idea about woman's right to vote has developed on other issues, including sexuality and reproductive rights, ideas about universal femininity, the body, gender, and heteronormativity. In its development, feminism is sometimes associated with lesbianism. This linkage occurs because lesbian and feminist criticism grow in response to patriarchal oppression. Raised as an orphan, the two main female characters in *Riding Freedom* struggle to survive and achieve their freedom and happiness. Charlotte in *Riding Freedom* obscures her feminist identity to get equal opportunities with men. Susan in *Fingersmith* fights for her rights, even though she engages in lesbianism. By using these two novels as primary data, and data on the development of feminism in America as secondary data, this study aims to show the evolution of feminism in America, starting from the issue of voting described in *The Riding Freedom*, to the issue of lesbianism in *Fingersmith's* novel as the effect of disappointment from man's oppression. Feminist criticism and lesbian criticism are the two theories used in this research. This study finds that American women's struggle to gain equality with men requires a long process. The trauma of men's oppression supports the practice of lesbianism in America.

**Keywords:** *feminism, lesbianism, man's oppression*

### **Introduction**

The issue of inequality against women has existed for a long time, and the struggle of women to gain equality and fight the oppression that has occurred for centuries has also been and will continue (Boizot, 2019; Pertiwi. et al., 2019). From time to time, women experience inequality and become victims of all forms of violence and discrimination. Until now, women still lack rights that are considered equal to men. Issues of violence in the world of work still exist because of the impartiality of the labor law against women. Cases of harassment against women also remain rife in all areas of society. The family is also one of the places where women's rights are deprived. In addition, the world of education as an educational institution even shows cases of women's abuse. In most societies, women are traditionally confined at home as daughters, wives, and mothers. These domestic boundaries provide barriers for women and men and significantly affect their social roles. Women began to question their position and were driven by many factors, including oppression and solid male domination. In addition, the inability of men to prove the role of the head of the family allows women to carry out the same roles as men. History has recorded the explosion of the women's movement known as the feminist movement. This movement aims to end sexist exploitation and oppression. The main goal of this movement is complete gender equality in law and practice in society.

Of the various women's movements worldwide, the women's movement in America is overgrowing (Anderson, 2014). Women in North America who were allowed to go to school earlier than in Europe began to think critically and question how society worked. The activists of this feminist movement are fighting to end slavery and the oppression of women. They organized the 'First Woman's Rights Convention' in 1848. They continued to campaign to improve the social position of all women, whose demands included demands for their wages instead of their husbands' wages, ownership status or property rights, and custody of children. Then came the waves of feminism, starting from the struggle of women to get the 'suffrage movement' in elections, the opportunity to work outside the home, the chance to get an education at the University, the struggle to end patriarchal practices and capitalism that cause women's oppression, and increase awareness of overlapping categories, such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Feminists actively utilize the media and pop culture to promote their ideas and activities. This further enriches the presence of feminist literature that raises the voice of women in the struggle for equality and freedom. Feminist literature contributes to the voice of women in society. Feminist literature aims to defend the rights of women in all fields. There are several writings produced by feminist writers such as Betty Friedan, Gloria Anzaldua, and Kate Chopin in the 1960s. One piece of *The Color Purple*, written by a feminist critic, deals with African-American women's lives. In addition, this literary work inflames women's struggle and the separation of women from traditional gender roles. Continuously, the development of feminist literature is as progressive as the internet mobilizes these issues to take action against sexism, hatred of women, or gender-based violence against women.

Literature as a part of human life can mirror the condition in society as literature is present in society. The journey of feminism in America is also recorded in American literature as it is inseparable from American society's myths, traditions, legends, and ways of life. This study uses two novels *Riding Freedom* and *Fingersmith*, which tell readers of the struggles of the female main characters to survive and achieve their freedom and happiness. *Riding Freedom*, written by Pam Munoz Ryan. This novel is a fictionalized biography of the main character, Charlotte Parkhurst, known as One-eyed Charley. This novel tells the story of a lady who disguises herself as a man to survive in the man's world and finally becomes the first female to vote in the United States. The second novel used in this study is *Fingersmith*, a thrilling tale of thievery, betrayal, and mistaken identity. Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* tells the story of two women from two very different stations of life whose fates are inextricably linked. The female characters in this novel fight for justice, rights, and freedom. Unlike *Riding Freedom*, whose main female character successfully brings change to women's emancipation, the main female characters in *Fingersmith* end up engaging in lesbianism. Both novels focus on the sexism issue, which is linked to the feminism issue. The two female characters think they are mistreated and oppressed by the man and rebel against male supremacy. The main characters are closely correlated with lesbian feminism.

The study employed these *Riding Freedom* and *Fingersmith* novels as primary data. Data on the development of feminism in America were applied as secondary data. This study aims to show the evolution of feminism in America, starting from the issue of voting described in *Riding Freedom*, to the issue of lesbianism in *Fingersmith's* novel as the effect of disappointment from man's oppression. Feminist criticism and lesbian criticism are the two theories used in this research. This study finds that American women's struggle to gain equality with men is a long process. Even in the modern era of the 20th century, men's

oppression is still intense in America. The trauma of this operation supports the practice of lesbianism in America.

## **Theory and Method**

### **This Feminist Criticism**

The issue of inequality appears in various literary productions and texts (Arsitowati, 2019; Saraswati, 2014). The feminist literary theory focuses on the relationship between men and women and their existence as part of society. There is a feminist literary theory that describes the inequality between men and women and the understanding of patriarchy in society (Tyson, 2006; Madsen, 2000). Inequality between men and women can be seen in values, power, patterns of thinking, and behavior. The study of feminists highlights that in history, literary values are mainly shaped by men or a patriarchal perspective. The word patriarchy is defined as a sexist thing that promotes the belief that women are inherently inferior to men. The existence of this innate inferiority of women is biological essentialism based on the biological differences between the sexes. Traditional gender roles place men as rational, strong, protective, and assertive; they view women as emotional, weak, nurturing, and submissive. These gender roles have been used successfully to justify injustices, which are still happening today, such as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions, paying men higher wages than women for doing the same work, and convincing women that they are unsuitable for careers in fields such as mathematics and engineering (Tyson, 2006).

Feminists always link to what is called 'biological difference'. It specifies women who differ from men, so all standards are set and influenced by the differences. The standards set by men to prove their masculinity and their patriarchal gender roles are often destructive for women and men. In America, the imperative for men to succeed economically has become very stressful because success is often associated with possessing material objects such as houses or cars. Suppose men meet these male criteria for their economic goals in contemporary America. In that case, they must improve their signs of manliness in some other area, such as they must be most sexually active or be able to hold the most liquor, or show the most anger. Women are victims of male anger and other violent behavior because they want to be seen superior or more robust than women.

Women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially, and psychologically. In every domain where patriarchy reigns, women are another. Women are objectified and marginalized, determined only by their differences from men's norms and values, determined by what men think they lack and what men think they have. All feminist activities can be seen as a form of activism to promote social change through political activities to fulfill women's rights (Tyson, 2006).

### **Lesbian Criticism**

Lesbian criticism is feminist in response to patriarchal oppression and the political need for separation from so-called male culture (Ellis & Peel, 2011; Jeffreys, 2003). The flow of lesbian feminism emerged at the end of the 20th century as part of the women's movement in fighting for women's rights (Ellis & Peel, 2010). Lesbian feminism considers same-sex relationships legitimate and uses their lesbian identity as a basis for community building and collective action. Lesbian feminism challenges perceptions of heterosexuality and male supremacy as normal and presents alternative ways of thinking about gender and power. Lesbian feminism addresses sexism-related issues and the difficulties of personal identity and political action beyond the influence of sexist ideology. Feminist lesbians are the basis for the relentless backlash tactics against feminism and the women's movement

against them against women's gender roles and expectations. Lesbianism with feminism underlies popular feminist stereotypes that are not completely serious in fighting for women's rights. Lesbian critics (Isen, 2013) discussed issues related to sexism and heterosexism.

Lesbian feminism suggests a politics of resistance to women's oppression. For this reason, this understanding focuses more broadly on the struggle for women's rights psychologically, socially, economically, and politically influenced by patriarchal male and heterosexual privileges. This understanding also highlights the existence of politics which is the end for lesbian and gay rights. Queer is seen as the antithesis of the goals of lesbian feminism because it removes lesbian specificity. Other lesbian feminists focus on a more inclusive approach to LGBT issues as they relate to white people.

### **Methods of Analysis**

This study uses qualitative research methods involving a naturalistic interpretive approach to the world. Concerning popular fiction qualitative research on popular fiction is aimed at making interpretations of how the audience or readers interpret and are loyal to certain types of popular fiction (Fithratullah, 2021; Sriastuti, 2022; Kasih, 2018). Through qualitative methods, research objectives can be achieved by looking at how existing social reality exists through consumers of popular fiction and connecting it with the meaning of popular fiction by consumers through conclusions or interpretations by researchers (Adi, 2011). Data in qualitative research is usually in the form of soft data in the form of words, photos, and symbols and can be collected using three methods: in-depth interviews, direct observation, and written documents (Creswell, 2012). Thus, data were collected from at least two sources, namely primary data in the form of the literary works of *Riding Freedom* and *Fingersmith*. The secondary data or other supporting data originated from various references that support interpreting or analyzing literary works, especially the development of feminism in America (Adi, 2011). In more detail, the data collection method can be done by cataloging, classifying, noting, categorizing, and paraphrasing (Creswell, 2012).

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Men's Oppression on Women in *Riding Freedom* and *Fingersmith***

*Riding Freedom*, written by Pam Munoz Ryan, tells the story of the first woman to vote in the American Union. Charlotte tries to disguise herself as a man as she wants to have the same right as a man, especially in giving a vote. This novel was set in the 1980s and delineates how the main character struggles to have equality in a different face, as a man. Charlotte finally successfully votes and proves herself the first woman voter in the U.S. As if giving a foreshadowing of what person Charlotte will be, Ryan opens the story by narrating Charlotte's birth in the early years of the mid-1800s and tells readers the baby's strength in surviving fatal illnesses that killed others children. Charlotte is an active baby who learns to do most things before other babies, like walking early. Little Charlotte shows her toughness by not easily crying unless something is taken away from her.

When she was nothing more than a bundle, she surprised her parents and puzzled the doctor by surviving several fevers. Folks said any other baby would have died, but Charlotte was already strong. She walked before most babies crawled. She talked before most babies babbled and never cried unless someone took something away from her (Ryan, 1998, p. 2).

Being left by her parents, who died in a wagon accident, small Charlotte, who was found safe while holding the reins of one of the horses, was sent to an orphanage for boys in New Hampshire. Growing up alongside boys, this little girl got used to playing with boy toys and did not act like a typical girl. She adopted boys' ways of thinking and even their characters. Charlotte lived in the orphanage until she was ten years old. There were two people she was close to. One was a younger boy named Hayward, whom she had rescued from being bullied by some other boys, and the other was Vern, an elderly runaway slave. Charlotte and Hayward dreamed of owning their ranch and raising horses. However, Charlotte and Hayward had to bury their dream as Hayward got adopted. Escaping from the orphanage, Charlotte disguised herself as a young boy, and she successfully gained success in her life. Another unfair treatment received by Charlotte was that she could beat other boys in a masculine competition. Riding her favorite horse, Freedom, Charlotte wins a race against other boys in the orphanage. This action was considered inappropriate and not suitable. Having lost the race, one of the jealous boys talked to the orphanage's overseer, Mr. Millshark, about Charlotte riding, who later forbade Charlotte to ride in the races anymore or work in the stables. Mutilating a woman's strength and ability is a man's oppression over a woman to 'return and place' a woman in her place.

The novel *Fingersmith* tells the story of the lives of two women who have different backgrounds. Sue Smith (also known as Sue Trinder) and Maud Lilly have been tricked and manipulated by those around them who want to beguile these ladies to take the fortune for their benefit. Being tired of all the manipulation and oppression, mainly done by the gentleman, these girls end up falling in love with each other, for they know that their 'girl-to-girl' relationship is more sincere than other relationships they have been involved in before. Like Charlotte in *Riding Freedom*, Sue and Maud also experience lives as orphans. Sue was raised as Mr. Ibbs and Mrs. Sucksby's child.

My name, in those days, was Susan Trinder. People called me Sue. I know the year I was born in, but for many years I did not know the date, and took my birthday at Christmas. I believe I am an orphan. My mother I know is dead. But I never saw her, she was nothing to me. I was Mrs Sucksby's child, if I was anyone's; and for father I had Mr Ibbs, who kept the locksmith's shop, at Lant Street, in the Borough, near to the Thames (Waters, 2002, p. 3)

After being left by her mother, Maud was taken care of by her uncle. Her earliest memory was when her mother was covered in blood, dying in childbirth. The nurses rear Maud in the psychiatric hospital where her mother was kept. "*Thus I learn the rudiments of discipline and order; and incidentally apprehend the attitudes of insanity. This will all prove useful later*" (Waters, 2002, p. 166). She starts to live with her uncle when she is around the age of nine. She was to be his secretary.

The three female characters, Charlotte in *Riding Freedom* and Sue and Maud in *Fingersmith* are stated to have experienced patriarchal oppression in their lives. *Patriarchal oppressions* are done by men and women who put patriarchal thought above the equality of men and women. At an early age, Charlotte, Sue, and Maud got unfair treatment from the people around them. Because Charlotte was a girl, the orphanage's cook, Mrs. Boyle, hid her from prospective parents to keep her as kitchen help. Mrs. Boyle thought that Charlotte needed to work on the kitchen stuff. Mrs. Boyle's selfish action prevents Charlotte from being adopted and getting a better life opportunity. She forces Charlotte to do 'girl work' as if she is reminding Charlotte about her sex with all her girl responsibility, which might not be fair as she is raised among boys. Though Charlotte helps in the kitchen, she loves working in the stables with Vern and has a particular way with the horses. It is



evident that ability is learnable by everyone, regardless of their sex. While Charlotte is forced to do women's work regarding her sex, Sue's weakness as a girl is considered weak and powerless when she is rented as a beggar for people to have mercy. The superior party uses the girl's stereotype as a weak, powerless being. This blunts women's strength and puts women in a lower position.

This is the first time I remember thinking about the world and my place in it. There was a girl named Flora, who paid Mrs Sucksby a penny to take me begging at a play. People used to like to take me begging then, for the sake of my bright hair; and Flora being also very fair, she would pass me off as her sister (Waters, 2002, p. 3)

Maud was raised by the nurses after the death of her mother. The nurses tended to raise her feminine side. She was raised like a cat pet, meaning she was exposed to her submissive and obedient character.

I pass my first ten years a daughter to the nurses of the house. I believe they love me. There is a tabby cat upon the wards, and I think they keep me, rather as they keep that cat, a thing to pet and dress with ribbons. I wear a slate-grey gown cut like their own, an apron and a cap; they give me a belt with a ring of miniature keys upon it, and call me 'little nurse'. I sleep with each of them in turn, in their own beds, and follow them in their duties upon the madhouse wards (Waters, 2002, p. 194).

Sexist ideology, referring to what is called “good girls” and “bad girl”, shows a patriarchal thought that suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have. If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she’s a “good girl”; if she doesn’t, she’s a “bad girl.” These two roles, also referred to as “madonna” and “whore” or “angel” and “bitch”, view women only in terms of how they relate to the patriarchal order. In order to be good girls, Charlotte, Sue, and Maud were forced to obey the rules designed to weaken and soften their behaviors, like doing the domestic works or acting like a lady-like. These patriarchal roles reflect projections of patriarchal male desire to control women’s sexuality so that men’s sexuality cannot be threatened in any way. While “bad girl” is claimed to violate patriarchal norms in some way, like questioning, criticizing, and rebelling the social norms designed by men, the “good girl” is rewarded for her behavior by being placed on a pedestal by patriarchal culture. A ‘good girl’ will be attributed to all the virtues associated with patriarchal femininity and domesticity, like being modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing, and nurturing. A good girl will put others’ needs before her own and her satisfaction is complete as she serves others. In Victorian culture in England she was the “angel in the house.” She made the home a safe haven for her husband, where he could spiritually fortify himself before resuming the daily struggles of the workplace, and for her children, where they could receive the moral guidance needed to eventually assume their own traditional roles in the adult world (Tyson, 2006).

The two novels have something in common, namely the lives of American women, set in the 1980s. At that time, women were defined or classified as 'good women'. Women are still considered as motherly figures which are reflected in middle and upper class white women and women's work only focuses on family and home. Women are required to master the domestic sphere, such as taking care of housework and raising children, while men work in the public sphere, such as business, trade, government. In conclusion, women of that era had to meet four criteria, namely piety, chastity, obedience, and household. In exchange for the existing order, women get husband protection, financial security and social status. As long as women functioned flawlessly within the domestic sphere and never ventured from it,

women were held in reverence by their husbands and general society. The next oppression was met by the three female characters in *Riding Freedom* and *Fingersmith* related to lack of freedom and opportunities. Charlotte decided to run away from the orphanage as she had no more close friends there. “She wouldn’t have the things she loved” (Ryan, 1998). She was afraid to run away, but more afraid to stay. Knowing that being a girl brought disadvantages for Charlotte as a girl has a lack of chance to work, Charlotte changed her name to Charley and disguised herself as a boy. Charlotte or Charley started to feel like “anything was possible” for she would have better opportunities to work in the world of men (Ryan, 1998). It was true that as Charley, Charlotte had a chance to be a stagecoach. Still disguised as male, Charlotte became a renowned stagecoach driver. She frequently drove important people. Until one day, Charlotte received an invitation to move to California to work for a new stagecoach company. Having been badly injured in her practice as a stagecoach and lost the vision in one of her eyes didn’t stop Charley from becoming a skillful stagecoach. She successfully saved enough money and purchased property. While being a woman prisoned women in their domestic world, a ‘disguised’ woman to a man had a wider opportunity to work publicly as a true man was concerned about success and moving up the social ladder. A man was assumed to be aggressive, competitive, rational, and channeled all of his time and energy into his work. While there is large variation across countries, men are more likely to own property than women almost everywhere. The history of feminist development in the U.S. showed more changes as, in the 1970s and 1980s, social and economic welfare issues were neglected. Families in the U.S. were experiencing financial decline, especially Latin American families. The economic downturn had a big impact on women who were in control of family management. This group completely ignored women's rights and had to experience the oppression and discrimination that are part of Latin culture. Despite living and living in America, women's rights in this group are still being ignored. Single women and widows in America got the same position as men until the end of the 20th century. This is in contrast to the rights of married women being taken away because of male domination.

The limitations for women are narrated in the *Fingersmith* through the treatments received by Sue and Maud, the two female characters. From the beginning of the story, Sue and Maud were conditioned to expose their femininity and act submissively to please the people who raised them. Sue Trinder grew up in the company of thieves and fences in the Borough of London. Sue was a *Fingersmith* or a pickpocket. Using Sue’ condition as an orphan and her skill as a petty thief, a con man called Gentleman persuaded her to become his accomplice in a scam designed to defraud a young high class heiress who will inherit her family’s wealth after getting married and dispose of her by committing her to a madhouse. Sue knew that this was her only chance to get a big amount of money to change her life. Using manipulation and trick to obey and do what men ask is proof that women’s position is lower than men. With his superiority, men use their power to give orders. Just like Sue, Maud also experienced the same oppression. Maud is treated as an object to please men. Raised by the nurses of a madhouse from the time of her mother's death in childbirth, Maud is claimed by her uncle, at the age of ten, where she was trained to move and speak softly, and to remain on the estate. Maud was always under the control of her uncle. Maud had a psychological abuse as she spent her mornings and evenings reading pornography to the old man or any other men. She also assisted her uncle in indexing a bibliography of all pornography. Maud had become the object of sex, through her voice and submissive behaviors. She had no freedom, but forced herself to do what her uncle had told her to do. Maud was not a prisoner, yet she was trapped with her uncle who minded nothing but her service to please him and other men by reading the pornography.

Aristotle, one of the most influential philosophers on western thought believed that “the relation of male to female is by nature a relation of superior to inferior and ruler to ruled”. Instead of being taught how to formulate ideas and arguments women were being exposed to domestic chores, singing, small talk and sewing. By “being educated like a fanciful kind of half being”, women were being taught to care about their looks, charm and manners instead of how to discern truth and become resilient beings. As life would always be a struggle, virtue can only be achieved by hardy people willing to test their minds and spirits. What makes it worse is that men have increased the inferiority of women. Women’s freedom are suppressed, controlled by laws, policies and discriminatory practices, and implicitly by social attitudes, cultural norms and patriarchal values.

Silencing is a part of prisoning freedom done by men to women. In many movies and novels, many scenes have shown how women are declared to have lost their sanity and are sent to asylum for having a mental disorder. In *Yellow Wallpaper*, the female character was diagnosed to have mental health problems with her husband, who was also a doctor, that she needed to be kept in a "rest cure" on a rented summer country estate, just because she was not acting submissively like what a woman should be. In *Fingersmith*, being lied to and tricked by the Gentleman, Sue was forcibly taken to the psychiatric hospital, where she was declared to be Maud Lilly. For the sake of the Gentleman to have fortune, Sue was accused to have delusions. Sue begins yelling and cursing, realizing she has been the one double-crossed, “You thought her a pigeon. Pigeon, my arse. That [expletive] knew everything. She had been in on it from the start” (Ryan, 1998, p. 161). Women are easily victimized for the cases they do not do, as they are considered as weak and inferior. In many cases, the patriarchal law gives more benefits to men than to women. While men are considered to be more logical and trustworthy, women are claimed to be irrational and untrustworthy.

### **Women’s Fight over Men’s Oppression in *Riding Freedom* and *Fingersmith***

Women’s fight over men’s oppression in *Riding Freedom* and *Fingersmith* is shown by proving their abilities, finding justice for themselves, and revealing their true selves. In *Riding Freedom*, Charlotte started her fight by proving her skills and revealing her identity. She cut off her hair and dresses as a boy. Using the name Charley, she left the orphanage, went from New Hampshire to Massachusetts, learnt to be a skillful stagecoach, and owned her own ranch. Although she lost one of her eyes, she kept learning to drive a six-horse coach with only one eye. Although it is not easy, she successfully uses all of her senses and perfectly mastered the art of driving with one eye. She came to be known in California as One-eyed Charley. Charlotte proved to society that she could master the skills that were usually related to men only. After all her success, Charlotte had a desire to vote and then reveal her identity as a woman to make the point that women know their own minds as well as men. Charlotte eventually placed her first vote in 1869, under the name Charles Parkhurst. She placed the vote in hope that when people learnt she was really a woman, she would have made a difference for those who could not vote. The setting of time of the story of *Riding Freedom* signed the women voting in America. Women were enfranchised in frontier Wyoming Territory in 1869 and in Utah in 1870. Because Utah held two elections before Wyoming, Utah became the first place in the nation where women legally cast ballots after the launch of the suffrage movement. On February 14, 1870, several women voted in the Salt Lake City municipal election They became the first women to legally cast a vote in a United States election under an equal suffrage law.

Like Charlotte’s fight in *Riding Freedom*, Sue and Maud in *Fingersmith* also struggle to get freedom by finding justice for themselves and revealing their identities. Sue got shocked and furious at being left at the psychiatric hospital and she also received a physical



violence from a doctor named Doctor Cristy who tortured her when she was in mental asylum. Sue does not only receive unfair treatments from the Gentlemen who manipulate and trick her, but also from the female doctor who does not show empathy toward her conditions, but tortures her. Oppressions to women are proven not just coming from men but also from women. Women who think they have a higher position to other women tend to treat other women cruelly and unfairly just because they think they are more powerful. This is a real application of patriarchal thought. Sue, who was justified to have delusions, managed to make an impression of the psychiatric hospital key and escaped from the mental asylum. She and the two make their way back to London. She immediately decided to find Maud to clear all the problems. Sue was jealous when she saw Maud in Mrs. Sucksby's bedroom. Maud who knew Sue had escaped from the hospital from the letter Sue sent to Mrs. Sucksby tried to send Sue a signal that she still loves her. It was true that Sue and Maud had loved each other. Their love grew as they experienced the same situation. Both were trapped in situations where they were hopeless and powerless. Sue, who came from a lower class, had no understanding of how important education was that her life ended up only becoming a thief or a servant. The only way to escape from her financial problems was by obeying what the Gentleman asked her to do, that was to trick Maud. However, Sue was doubtful as she knew that Maud, though she came from a different social status, she also had an uneasy life. Maud who came from upper class and learnt about proper ethics of reading, painting and playing, music instruments had to do an inappropriate task burdened by her uncle in his library, like reading pornography and arranging pornography books. Maud wanted to protect Sue out of love. They did love each other. Their togetherness while they were staying at Briar house made them close. Until one day the feeling changed from sisterhood to passionate love just like man to woman. They were afraid of losing each other. Maud admired Sue's caring towards her and Sue admired Maud's beauty and body shape.

So, I kissed her again. Then I touched her. I touched her face. I began at the meeting of our mouths—at the soft wet corners of our lips—then found her jaw, her cheek, her brow—I had touched her before, to wash and dress her; but never like this. So smooth she was! So warm! It was like I was calling the heat and shape of her out of the darkness—as if the darkness was turning solid and growing quick, under my hand. She began to shake. I supposed she was still afraid. Then I began to shake, too (Waters, 2002, p. 149).

At the end of the story, when Sue and Maud got free from all the trouble they had, they decided to unite again as a couple. A study given Anderson (2014) found out that before the 1960s, gay and lesbian gatherings grew throughout the United States and were discovered in metropolitan areas, bars, or private homes. In that era, many lesbians supposed feminine or masculine gender roles and, often, modesty in dress. Many of these communities perform underground as a means of protection from rampant hostility, physical violence, social exclusion, harassment, and job loss. With the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s, special attention to lesbians appeared as part of a broader challenge to sexism. Lesbians play an essential role in many new feminist organizations, helping to regulate equality in the workplace, home, and court. Lesbian feminism delivers a way for women to free themselves from male domination and heterosexism. The study on gay and lesbian relationships also found that society is based on two central claims. The first is the assertion that heterosexuality includes more than just a form of sexual desire. It also functions as an institution supporting male supremacy and female subordination.

## Conclusion

Both novels used as the primary data of this study, *Riding Freedom* and *Fingersmith*, not only share the same theme about women's struggle over patriarchal oppression but also share the same setting that is America in the 1980s. The reason behind the choice of the setting may be related to the Women's Rights Movement that happened in the 1980s. The campaign for women's suffrage in America began before the Civil War. During the 1820s and '30s, the issues and acts of women owning properties had started, regardless of how much money or property they had. At the same time, women who joined religious movements, moral-reform societies, and anti-slavery organizations started to reform. These two novels expose women's struggle for freedom and equality and reveal identities. *Fingersmith* bravely exposes further lesbianism as the result of the same experiences and feelings of the men's oppressions related to psychological, social, economic, and political issues that make women trust and get attached to other women better than their trust and attraction to men. Therefore, lesbian criticism is often related to feminist criticism as both are responses to patriarchal oppression as the issue of lesbianism appeared along with the second wave of feminism in America.

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